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State OKs building permits

After further clarification from the state today, the ban on building permits in the Northeast Interceptor (NEI) service area has been lifted. In a letter Wednesday, the state told New Hanover County and the city that building permits may be issued after reacting to a plan the city and county submitted last week about ways to divert flow from the NEI.

The letter is the latest development in ongoing negotiations with the state for the contract that will outline efforts to improve the NEI. The contract, called a Special Order of Consent (SOC), will make the city accountable for getting needed repairs done or face steep fines. The city already has a repair plan in place and underway; recommended repairs are expected to be completed within the next 11 months. The contract also outlines ways to help reduce the amount of wastewater flowing through the NEI while repairs are underway.

In Tuesday's letter, the state said the city and county should continue to divert wastewater from the NEI to the Northside Wastewater Treatment Plant. Also the state has agreed to allow up to 120,000 gallons of wastewater promised through building permits to be issued in the NEI service area, along with another 120,000 promised through building permits to the Northside service area.

The city received another letter from the state Tuesday stating that the moratorium of sewer extensions for the area that serves the Southside Wastewater Treatment Plant has been lifted. The moratorium on extensions for the NEI service area remains in place.

Background: The city, county and Wrightsville Beach all contribute to the wastewater flowing through the NEI, which is nine miles long and runs from Wrightsville Beach to the Southside Treatment Plant on River Road. Note: the county is responsible for issuing building permits for the city and unincorporated areas, while the city is responsible for making sure buildings meet zoning requirements. Wrightsville Beach issues its own building permits.